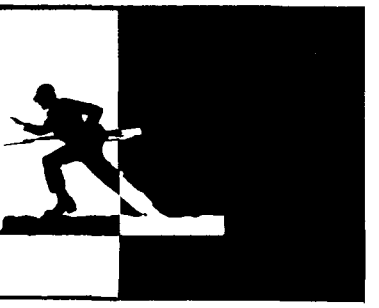
INFANTRY LETTERS



DIEN BIEN PHU

The article "Dien Bien Phu 1954: A Historical Perspective," by Captain James R. Nagel (INFANTRY, September-October 1994, pages 32-38) was of great interest to me, as I was involved in picking up 100 of the 500 survivors the Viet Minh had released and sent down to Saigon for our 374th Troop Carrier Wing C-124s to take back to Tachikawa, Japan. Military Air Transport Service (MATS) crews then picked them up and flew them back to France (or maybe it was somewhere in North Africa). This was Operation WOUNDED WARRIOR in early July 1954, a few weeks before the Geneva "peace" agreement was signed.

The big surprise for our flight crew personnel from Tachikawa was discovering that most of the wounded were not the Foreign Legionnaires we expected to find but colonial troopers from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. (The passenger manifest of our particular flight was among several items that I sent to the Infantry Museum at Fort Benning.)

When we approached Manila Bay on the first leg back to Tachikawa, I closed my navigation log and went to the troop deck of the C-124 to point out the island of Corregidor to three of the legionnaires I had been talking with before we left Tan Son Nhut. I thought these survivors of a famous battle might be interested in seeing another such site, and all of them pressed attentively against the windows.

No bells rang on that trip to alert me that I'd be back at Tan Son Nhut 15 years later for a somewhat longer stay.

JACK MUDIE
Glendale, California

CLOSE-COMBAT OPTIC FOR THE FUTURE

Combat studies after World War II and the Korean War showed that most rifle fire at close-in targets—less than 300 meters—was aimed quickly, because using iron sights took too long and exposed soldiers to enemy fire. By the Vietnam War, unaimed "area" suppressive fire from the fully automatic M16A1 assault rifle worked only at short range in closed terrain.

Instead of abandoning longer range marksmanship, however, we need to adopt the XM86 red-dot or blue-dot reflex firing combat optic for faster, more accurate fire. Six years ago, I wrote to INFANTRY advocating a collimator reflex/night sight—called the occluded eye gunsight (OEG). The U.S. Army Special Forces who raided the Son Tay POW camp on 21 November 1970 devastated the enemy with accurate fire using a collimator reflex night sight.

Today, the OEG costs less than a pair of boots and is used by many units. Most important, it bolts to the carrying handle of the M16, allows for the use of iron sights for long-range accuracy, weighs just 4.5 ounces, and requires no batteries. It uses the Bindon aiming concept, in which both eyes remain open, one looking at the red dot (illuminated by a radioactive tritium element) while the other looks at the target. The firer sees a red dot on the target when he shoulders the rifle, then fires, hitting the target in a split second day or night.

A cousin to the OEG, the advanced combat optical gunsight (ACOG), is now in use in Special Forces by designated marksmen for reflex firing and for longer range target acquisition and firing. It is a 3.5-power scope with a red aiming post illuminated by a radioactive element—again requiring no batteries. (It is important that the Army choose a reflex collimator sight that does not require batteries. A rifleman can't have his optic fail him in a firefight because of a dead battery—as MILES-equipped weapons often do at the National Training Center. And a battery-powered optic may not work around water; even watertight seals can eventually deteriorate.)

The reflex close-combat optic chosen needs to be soldier-proof and logistically undemanding, and it should allow for reflex short-range firing day or night as well as for long-range sniping, and it must interface with NVGs. The answer is to have OEGs for most soldiers and ACOGs for a designated marksman in every squad.

The new objective individual combat weapon seeks an exploding munition that will reduce the soldier's need to get a line-of-sight flight path for his bullets, but this does not address the realities of combat situations. Maneuvering U.S. soldiers may be pinned down by larger numbers of enemy soldiers (who are firing unlimited ammunition from behind cover) and unable to use their sights at all to gain effective fire superiority.

What's missing is a lightweight rifleman's gun shield (RGS) that would affix to the M16 bayonet lug and give the soldier just enough ballistic protection to peer out from cover, aim, and fire. The RGS principle is already in use on many rocket launchers and recoilless rifles. An RGS would defeat enemy bullets before they reached soldiers' body armor. When not attached to the rifle, the RGS can be a back plate for Ranger body armor, attached to the rucksack rear as an armor plate (rucksack becomes mobile prone firing point), or affixed to the front handlebars of a folding all-terrain bicycle as a wind and ballistic shield.

Since the soldier is now considered a *system*, we need to look at him in his

entirety—the way he acquires his targets, aims, and fires. Whether he can be protected enough as he does this needs to be figured in at the same time. Combat has often shown that even TA-50 gear can provide ballistic protection if it is positioned to increase a soldier's mobility and protection.

MIKE SPARKS
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MOGADISHU, OCTOBER 1993

We want to thank INFANTRY for the two-part series on the battle in Mogadishu, by Captain Charles P. Ferry, which we used to support training, education, and development for the officers in our U.S. Army ROTC battalion at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. *(See "Mogadishu, October 1993: Personal Account of a Rifle Company XO," September-October 1994, pages 22-31, and "Mogadishu, October 1993: A Company XO's Notes on Lessons Learned," November-December 1994, pages 31-38.)*

From information in these articles, we were able to develop a class about the battle and present it to the cadre and cadets in our weekly officer and NCO professional development program.

This class enabled us to show the cadets what we believe is the future battlefield of the U.S. armed forces and also the way NCOs and officers work together to make "the team concept" of the Army come to life.

We are pleased to say that the class was a success, and we hope other readers of these articles benefitted from them as much as we did.

NELSON G. KRAFT
2LT, Infantry
JOSEPH CAMIOLO
SSG, U.S. Army

Captain Charles P. Ferry's article, "Mogadishu, October 1993," in the November-December 1994 issue of INFANTRY was highly informative and should be studied by all combat arms leaders. The insights and experiences he shares should help put to rest many of the issues concerning the use of limited training time and dollars for operations other than war (OOTW).

Our Army has only one purpose—to fight and win our nation's wars. Operations other than war are contingencies that we can and should perform, but OOTW tasks are not our primary mission or focus. Disciplined combat units that are already well trained in their battle tasks and have developed a high esprit de corps can accomplish OOTW tasks with minimal train-up. Conversely, a unit that has not trained in depth on its battle tasks but has devoted training to possible OOTW contingencies cannot be expected to fight and win—at the least possible cost to its personnel and equipment—once it is required to fight.

A recurring point in the article is: Train hard in peace for war. Units, specifically combat units, should focus training on warfighting skills. Soldiers must be trained by squad leaders on individual tasks, and this training must be incorporated into platoon and company collective training. Then, both the individual and collective training must focus on and make considerable use of battle drills.

Two areas that Captain Ferry found to be high pay-off training for combat were live fire exercises and physical training (PT). These two areas apply equally to all units, whether they are mechanized or light infantry, armor or artillery, combat support or combat service support.

Live fire training must begin with preliminary marksmanship instruction and then progress through the standard qualification courses up to training that incorporates all small arms, heavy weapons, artillery, and close air support. These live fire exercises must be conducted with soldiers as close as possible to the impact of each caliber round. Offensive live fire exercises must incorporate the full spectrum of available weapons and must not be excessively controlled by safety personnel. Team leaders, squad leaders, platoon sergeants, platoon leaders, executive officers, and commanders are sufficient for safety, and they will be the only ones present during combat or other operations. They must therefore be properly trained and exposed to numerous live fire exercises themselves. If defending from prepared positions, there should be no reason that indirect fires cannot be adjusted at 300 meters or less from the battle position. The key to realistic and safe live fire exercises such as these is well-disciplined training at all levels of leadership. It was these same levels of discipline that Captain Ferry found were required during combat in an OOTW mission.

Physical training must also be structured so as to prepare all soldiers for combat, including mechanics, medics, and administrative clerks who will deploy with their units. The soldiers in Captain Ferry's unit experienced sustained combat operations in urban terrain—some of the most difficult combat terrain available—for nine hours, in full combat gear, carrying double basic loads of ammunition. A PT program that involves only stretching, push-ups, sit-ups, and a short run will not prepare a soldier or leader for such operations. Physical training must also include road marches with full combat load including ammunition, flak vest, and kevlar helmet. Bayonet training, obstacle courses, and orienteering events should also be included. This training must be conducted during the day and at night and in all types of weather, and many training events should end in some kind of weapon firing exercise. Additionally, a missed meal will not hurt anyone, and it can be expected that during combat food will not always be readily available at a set time.

What Captain Ferry's experiences reveal in lessons learned for our use as leaders is that we, as infantry leaders and the Army as a whole, must not train soldiers to expect a nine-to-five job, money for college, or a routine, comfortable, and risk-free work environment. We cannot accept or condone low standards of appearance, training, or atten-

tion to detail. We must continue to focus our efforts on building well-trained and disciplined soldiers and units that will be able to withstand the stress and confusion of combat operations and succeed, whether they began as humanitarian operations or as an all out attack by a world superpower.

JEFFREY D. CHURCH
CPT, Infantry
Fort Irwin, California

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Captain Charles P. Ferry's two-part series on his experiences as a rifle company executive officer in Somalia. I would like to offer several comments on a number of the points he makes in the second of these articles.

First, on using "every available training aid to simulate loaded magazines" and the like, I suggest that all Infantry leaders read and study the article "Ammunition: Dummy, Inert, and Simulated," by Captain Derek A.N. Soriano, in INFANTRY, November-December 1987, pages 11-13.

Second, on conducting eight-mile runs, I see no reason for this kind of training for any type of unit. I certainly approve of long marches with proper loads, but this kind of run may eventually do more harm than good. The Army standard, I believe, is a timed two-mile run, and this should be enough to satisfy any commander. If it is not, he should get the standard changed. I would propose that all Infantry trainers become familiar with the three-part series of articles on training and the soldier's load that appeared in the first three 1990 issues of INFANTRY. The articles were prepared by personnel assigned to the Physical Fitness School and the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine.

Finally, I dispute the company's requirement that its soldiers armed with the M16 carry between 350 and 420 rounds of ammunition. I know they probably needed that much ammunition in one engagement (one that should never have happened). But how many rounds did these soldiers fire in the other engagements? That's an awful load to put on an infantryman, and I really do not believe even 210 rounds should be considered a good basic load. (I've often wondered how many rounds were fired by our individual riflemen in Grenada, in Panama, and Kuwait.) What else did a rifleman have to carry in the way of ammunition? M60 ammunition? M249 ammunition? Concussion grenades?

Captain Ferry speaks of commanders tending to overload their soldiers, or the soldiers tending to overload themselves. I can understand this attitude in this particular unit, but I hope that not all infantry units emulate this example.

ALBERT N. GARLAND
LTC, Infantry
U.S. Army Retired
Columbus, Georgia

I have just finished reading, for the second time, "Mogadishu, October 1993," by Captain Charles P. Ferry. It is a useful and timeless description of how well-led infantrymen can be trained and motivated to accomplish any ground mission. The keys, which are well brought out in the article, are dedicated leadership, live fire training, and motivation.

I congratulate Captain Ferry and INFANTRY on an excellent article typical of the kind infantrymen need for their education.

HARRY M. KEMP
COL, U.S. Army Retired
San Antonio, Texas

WEAKNESSES AND FIXES

I recently came across Robert Gaudet's letter on mortar smart munitions in INFANTRY's July-August 1994 issue (pages 3-4). Mr. Gaudet correctly points out that, in today's more urban mission environment, collateral damage from area weapons is a serious concern. He suggests that smart munitions are the best and most practical firing solution for mortar systems. My experience with field artillery and mortar systems leads me to disagree with this conclusion.

It is true that the field artillery has had success in fielding the M712 Copperhead projectile, but the story does not end there. In practice, most commanders would agree, the expense of the Copperhead renders it impractical as a primary projectile.

There is limited training opportunity and even less opportunity for joint training use. Precision guided munitions require well-trained forward observers (FOs) with stable and secure positions well forward of a normal FEBA (forward edge of the battle area). It is hard to envision such operations in fluid urban battlefields similar to those in Somalia or Bosnia.

More important is the overall expense of the system. Field artillery doctrine requires limited use of smart munitions; the current directive is: "Only high pay-off targets." These targets are normally identified well in advance of the battle and are not left to the observer's discretion.

Well-trained FOs, proper use of meteorological data, and accurate weapon positioning offer a more practical solution to the mortar accuracy problem. Infantrymen should spend a substantial portion of training time working on these skills. The call-for-fire format, estimating distance, sector sketching, sending polar missions, and shifting from known points are currently areas of weakness.

The main weakness with mortar systems is their inability to communicate directly on the fire direction net. If long-range mortar sections were supplied with accurate and timely weather data, system registration would be faster and more meaningful. Incorporating the global positioning system (GPS) into the mortar ballistic computer will allow mortar sections to lay their platoons rapidly and accurately. As a final note, mortar sections should spend more time on coordinated registrations and fire missions.

These changes are inexpensive and

flexible. Once incorporated, they would provide a significant reduction in collateral damage and improve weapon efficiency.

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1LT, Field Artillery
Indiana Army National Guard

THE STUDY OF MILITARY HISTORY

I am writing in response to Lieutenant Randi I. Buros' letter on the study of military history in the January-February 1995 issue of INFANTRY (page 3). He has made some good points, and raises some issues that deserve clarification.

We study military history, not because it offers ready solutions to the challenges faced by today's leaders, but because it is fundamental to the professional development of officers and noncommissioned officers. It provides the soldier with valuable insights into the profession of arms, and offers the benefit of experience which has often been gained at terrible cost in men and materiel.

History in general—and military history in particular—is the link between the past and the future, between theory and practice. History broadens our perspective on life, sharpens our judgment, improves our perception, and molds our leadership qualities. Make no mistake about it: history shapes our future, and makes the difference between success and failure. Our Army recognizes this, and has gone to great lengths to document the lessons learned in past wars. In the field of logistics, the experience of Allied and Axis forces in North Africa contributed a great deal to the organization and conduct of Coalition logistical operations during the Gulf War. Iraqi units, on the other hand, evidently overlooked those same lessons; the breakdown of their logistical system was one factor contributing to their catastrophic defeat.

We must never forget that the one constant in history is the human element. The fundamental issues facing us today are no different from those of the past. While the tools we may use to solve our problems today may be vastly different from those our ancestors used in the past, the process of defining the problem, coming up with viable alternatives, choosing a course of action, and then executing that course of action to achieve success on the battlefield has not changed over time.

As human beings, we tend to be creatures of habit. This means we like to do the same things over and over again. It makes us feel good and secure. In other words, we're comfortable with the known. This also means that history never repeats itself. History is only a word, a noun that means "learning by inquiry." It is we, the creatures of habit, who keep "reinventing the wheel" and repeating our mistakes, simply because we don't like change or fear the unknown. This is a direct result of a lack of historical mindedness.

History can free us from the bondage of fear. It permits us to discover the meaning of the past and relate it properly to the present. A knowledge of the past provides vicarious experience otherwise unobtainable for the soldier. And once we understand our past, then and only then can we chart a good course for the future. For if we don't know where we've come from, and have little idea of where we are now, can we know where to go in the future?

History provides the soldier with valuable insights into the fundamentals of the profession of arms. The comprehensive study of military history is vital to successful leadership and a must for every military leader.

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FIRST DIVISION REUNION

The Society of the First Division (Big Red One), which is composed of soldiers who served in World War I, World War II, Vietnam, DESERT STORM, and in peacetime, will hold its 77th Annual Reunion 9-14 August 1995 at the Hyatt Orlando, Kissimmee, Florida.

For information, please write to me at 5 Montgomery Avenue, Erdenheim, PA 19038, or call (215) 836-4841.

ARTHUR L. CHAITT
Executive Director
Society of the First Division